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SUBJECT: NIGER TRIP REPORTS (3) THE NOMADIC ZONE

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SUMMARY

1. (SBU) This is the third cable in a series of trip reports (reftels A&B) that examine conditions, contacts, and political issues in central and northern Niger. This edition takes a look at the nomadic zone known as the Azaouagh (or Azawak). A large and sparsely populated zone in the northern part of Niger's Tahoua Region, the Azaouagh borders Mali and Algeria. Its population of Tuareg and Arab herders moves and trades across those borders. Reftels C, D, and E examined the security implications of this, and of the Azaouagh's large number of Tuareg and Arab ex-rebels. This report examines development issues in three communities: Kao, where little change is evident; Tchintabaraden, where meeting basic development needs is a struggle for the local government; and, Ingall, where prospects of tourism development and uranium mining elicit both hope and concern. END COMMENT

Kao: Isolation Breeds Contentment

2. (U) Twenty-five kilometers north of the point where the dirt road leading to Tchintabaraden (Tchinta) branches off from the Agadez highway lies the village of Kao. Two-thousand people live in the village, which is the "chef lieu" (seat) of a rural commune of the same name. The commune has a population of 35,000. While passing through Kao en route to Tchinta, Poloff stopped to visit the commune council, SG, and an ex-combatant project. Kao has only 36 officially registered ex-combatants, suggesting locals' limited role in the rebellion. The overall sense in this desolate community was of satisfaction with the status quo. While some communal councils press the visitor with "doleances" (pleas for aid) and development plans, Kao's officials seemed content to sip tea and pass the time of day. They noted that the rains and harvest in their agro-pastoral commune were ok this year; that the security situation was calm, with no problems posed by bandits, Salafists, or rebels; and, that the ex-combatants were doing fine and keeping quiet-though they could always use more money. High blood pressure didn't seem to be a problem for Poloff's interlocutors in Kao-everything, it seemed, was on an even keel.

3. (U) The notion that isolation breeds contentment finds considerable evidentiary support in Kao. The village has electricity for just seven hours each day (5pm to midnight). There is no functioning rural radio. Contacts said that cellular service provider Celtel, which has purchased land for a tower but built nothing to date, will come "eventually." They did not seem unduly concerned as to when. There is no television service in Kao, but limited national radio reception started in 2006. In the absence of cell or land-line coverage, locals make do with a "telecentre Thuraya," where one can make satellite phone calls for 810 CFA

(\$1.62) per minute (to cell numbers). Locals noted that that was "four times more expensive than a normal call." In other words, the only link that most residents of Kao can hope to have with the broader world comes at a price that few of them can afford. NOTE: This underscores the importance of the cell phone revolution in the developing world. The dramatic fall in prices that Celtel will occasion when its service commences will enable Kao's residents to have contact with family members and kinsmen abroad or in other parts of Niger. It would be interesting to see if the glimpse of a broader world thereby afforded will dent the complacency of the place. END NOTE

14. (U) The village has a standard local health clinic with one nurse, but no facilities for giving birth. For that, one has to travel fifty-seven kilometers north (probably by donkey cart) to Tchintabaraden. Kao does seem to have adequate school facilities, though Poloff did not touch on issues of staffing or quality of education in those facilities. The village has a nomadic school, a primary school, and a middle school. The Commune has a tax collector, an SG, and a municipal secretary. All other civil service cadres are located at the departmental seat-Tchintabaraden-and cover Kao from there.

15. (U) A few partners are there to help out-Kao is covered by the World Bank's Programme Action Communautaire (PAC), and by UNICEF's efforts to support basic education. There are also some Nigerien NGOs there, though no one seemed to be very sure of what they were doing, if anything. The Commune's development priorities were discussed in the same lackadaisical manner as everything else. Like other nomadic zone communities, they wanted wells dug. Unlike Tchintabaraden, they did not have a very exact sense of where this should be done. They noted that their women's cooperatives would be looking for assistance and microcredit, but that they were only at the stage of initial organization and not yet ready to develop plans

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or seek training / finance. Things move slowly in Kao, but the people seem quite content with the pace they've set. COMMENT: Kao will be covered by TSCTP funded decentralization training / revenue generation project. END COMMENT

Tchintabaraden: Good Governance
and the Struggle for Development
in the Nomadic "Chef Lieu."

16. (U) Located at the end of an 82 kilometer dirt road, Tchintabaraden (Tchinta), a town of 20,000 people, is "chef lieu" of an urban commune of 39,000 and a Department of 115,000 persons. To the extent that any place may be fairly described as the "chef lieu," or capital of the Azaouagh nomadic zone, it is Tchinta. It was here, in 1990, that the Tuareg rebellion started. In February of that year, Khaddafi expelled many Nigerien Tuaregs from Libya after years of using them as proxy fighters in his "Islamic Legion." In May, a group of these returnees perpetrated a series of armed robberies and attacks on GON facilities in Tchinta. The Nigerien Army was sent in to restore order, which it did by massacring at least 54 Tuaregs. More than 100 other Tuaregs were rounded up and sent to the Niamey and Kollo prisons. The rebellion was ignited.

17. (U) Today, Tchinta is home to 383 officially registered ex-combatants (of 3,160 in total). They live in a political environment characterized by one of the most important outcomes of the rebellion-political decentralization. The region's communities can now elect their own local governments, which work in concert with the formerly dominant - and largely southern - central government administrators. Many of these local officials are impressive; so too are the development challenges facing them.

18. (U) Poloff met Tchinta's dynamic and intelligent Tuareg Mayor, former International Visitor Ikoum Mohammed, and saw how little he had to work with. The nomadic zone "chef lieu's" facilities are in a sorry state, which illustrates the particularly difficult development environment of the Azaouagh. The 12 bed hospital, which

serves the entire region, was filthy and outdated. Lacking materials, proper space for surgery, privacy for patients, regular electricity and water, vehicles, paint and basic maintenance, it can be of little use to anyone who seeks assistance there. A decade after the peace-accords, a Tuareg or Arab seeking services at the Tchinta hospital could not be blamed for concluding that the GON cared little about his or her health or welfare.

¶9. (U) While Tchinta's needs are as great, and its resources as few as those of many other Nigerien towns, two things make its case different and, from the perspective of US assistance, more compelling: Tchinta's commune government consists of problem solvers who display an uncommon degree of acumen and managerial skill; and, Tchinta is the public service provision point for the strategically critical Azaouagh zone.

¶10. (U) Tchinta was founded in 1964 for precisely that reason. Like other towns in the Azaouagh, it was not an organic village but a deliberate creation of the GON, which convinced the chief of the third Tuareg Groupement to establish his seat there. Designed to serve as a point where nomads could come, obtain the full range of government services, and pay taxes, Tchinta evolved into the de-facto capital of the Azaouagh. Much of its demographic and economic prominence derived from sedentarization of nomads during the droughts of the early 1970s and mid 1980s.

¶11. (U) Mayor Mohammed stressed the commune's development needs and its ability to manage assistance. Noting that the commune's rate of tax recovery was high, at between 65% and 71% of potential revenue, the mayor conceded that Tchinta was still just keeping its head above water. City Hall is a converted residence; the shower serves as storage space; everything is shrouded in dust. Nevertheless, the mayor presented his town's budget figures and commune development plan with authority and an impressive command of detail. He admitted that some locally funded initiatives had failed, and that some budget line items had not worked out as planned, and then explained why-the first mayor in Poloff's experience to be so forthcoming. While he listed as many as twenty sites in the commune that needed wells, he stressed that the commune was doing four of them itself this year, and that nine were considered priority sites because of especially heavy use by livestock, proximity to nomadic camps, or, in one case, proximity to a nomadic school that would suffer a drop in enrollment if water could not be provided. COMMENT: This ability to prioritize among competing development projects is far from universal in Niger, and suggests that Tchinta's officials have done some real thinking and made some tough decisions rather than just throwing a long list of requests at the feet of donors and hoping for the best. With respect to revenue, Tchinta's relatively high recovery rate may be explained by the small size and ethno-linguistic homogeneity of this Tuareg town. It may be easier

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to create a sense of mutual responsibility in such an environment.
END COMMENT

¶12. (U) Mayor Mohammed noted that, in the absence of a partner on decentralization, the commune had approached the German program LUCOP and obtained training from them, using their own resources. He was pleased to learn that the TSCTP financed MercyCorps decentralization program would be targeting the Azaouagh for training and revenue generating activities. Tchinta is on their list. Ever the self-starter, the mayor commented that leatherworking, dairy processing, and artisanal craft production were all reasonable sources of income that the commune was attempting to encourage.

¶13. (U) Overall, hydrology seemed to be the biggest area of development concern. Pointing out a stream of water running through one of Tchinta's main streets, the Mayor noted that it came from one of the town's water towers, which were broken. The town provides its residents with running water on a phased neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis each day.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: A visit to Tchinta illustrates both the severity of the development challenges posed by the nomadic zone and the energy with which local leaders are trying to address them. The

urban commune of Tchintabaraden has good leadership and plenty of popular support. However, it has fewer resources and partners and more strategic importance than many of its southern counterparts. By virtue of donor indifference, the USG has the room to position itself as the single most important donor in Tchinta and throughout the Azaouagh. Embassy Niamey's two TSCTP financed activities are a big step in that direction, but some humanitarian assistance directed toward high visibility projects like the hospital, village wells, or municipal water system would really put the USG's stamp on this sensitive and neglected region. END COMMENT

Ingal: High Hopes Off the Beaten Track

¶15. (U) Nigeriens and expatriates associate Ingal with the nomadic festival known as the Cure Salee - and little else. A visit to Ingal "out of season" afforded a sense of what was on peoples' minds.

¶16. (U) At the entrance to the town there is an old stone "castle" apparently built by the French or a local nobleman, depending on who one choose to believe. Later converted into a school, it educated the first generation of modern Tuareg leaders. Former Niamey Governor Jules Ouguet, former Agadez Mayor Akali Dowel, MNSD power-broker Elhadji Habibou Allele - in short, any major, establishment Tuareg figure over a certain age - all came out of that school. At present, the commune is seeking to parlay this eccentric old folly into a revenue-maker by converting it into a museum of dinosaur bones. To this end, they have had some discussions with University of Chicago paleontologist Paul Sarano. Located off the main road (which ceased to run through Ingal on its way to Agadez in the 1980s) but quite near the dinosaur-rich escarpment known as the Falaise Tiguidit, Ingal has high hopes for a tourism fueled future based on more than just the annual Cure Salee.

¶17. (U) While the Cure puts Ingal on the map for foreigners and Nigeriens alike, a few days of attention each year aren't enough to meet the development needs of this ancient mud-brick "banco" village. As noted in reftel F, the area north of town is now in play as a uranium prospecting zone. The prospect of mining was taken as a mixed blessing by the municipal counselors Poloff met. Concerned by the environmental costs and lifestyle changes mining would bring to town, locals seem to prefer the surer and less invasive route of tourism development.

¶18. (U) Linked to the Agadez highway by one of the best roads in Niger, they feel that Ingal has a shot at marketing itself as a regional tourism destination. Tour companies with a little government coordination could set up a "dinosaur tour" south of Agadez as a logical extension of the mountain / desert tours in the Air. Ingal, with its nascent dinosaur bone museum, could be the focal point of such a tour. No other town along the Falaise Tiguidit is so well linked by road to Agadez and Tahoua; no other town has as interesting an old quarter as Ingal. With its ancient Grand Mosque (built by Songhai Emperor Askia Mohammed in 1325), Sultan's house (complete with the tomb of the current Sultan's father), and picturesque combination of hills, oases, and palm groves, Ingal has much potential. Even without a modern hotel, the town affords many superb camp sites.

¶19. (U) COMMENT: Such are local leaders' hopes. As was often the case in the nomadic zone, decentralization had brought creative people to the forefront. Ideas for development were plentiful, and locals brainstormed and planned in a manner that suggested both empowerment and practicality. While limited resources frustrate many

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plans, a sense of optimism and hope still prevails among the minority communities of the zone. Decentralization's greatest success in the nomadic zone may be psychological. END COMMENT
ALLEN.